



# The Cape Cod House: an Introductory Study



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1. To provide a useful forum and to facilitate enjoyable contacts for all those whose special interest is the history of architecture.
2. To foster an appreciation and an understanding of the great buildings and architects of all historic cultures.
3. To encourage research in architectural history and to aid in disseminating the results of such research.
4. To promote the preservation of significant architectural monuments.



# The Cape Cod House: an Introductory Study

ERNEST ALLEN CONNALLY University of Illinois

THAT compact story-and-a-half house which we commonly know as the Cape Cod cottage (fig. 1) is one of the best known and most frequently imitated forms in the repertory of traditional American architecture. Yet, despite its wide appeal, both professional and popular, it has been generally neglected in serious historical study.<sup>1</sup> It is the purpose here to make available the results of a recent survey,<sup>2</sup> with the hope of encouraging further knowledge of this important type of American folk-building.

The term 'Cape Cod house' has been in use now for about a century and a half. The phrase is first recorded by a president of Yale College, Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), who in 1800 visited the Cape, where he found the houses so specialized in character and so closely adhering to a pattern that they specified to a 'class' and could 'be called, with propriety, Cape Cod houses.'<sup>3</sup> Thus by the end of the



Fig. 1. Gormley House, Herring Pond Road, Wellfleet, ca. 1830 (photo: Cervin Robinson for HABS). A typical Cape Cod house, characteristically a story and a half with gables, central chimney, shingled sides, exterior housing for cellar stairs, 9/6 light sashes. This is one of the few examples on the Lower Cape with a (slightly visible) bowed roof. Now owned by Charles Gormley.

1. Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 67–68, touches the subject briefly. 'The Cape Cod Cottage', Part I, *Architectural Forum* (Feb. 1949), pp. 89–94, a commendable attempt, will not be found entirely satisfactory by the architectural historian; Part II (March 1949), pp. 101–106, deals with modern versions. The two books on the subject are exclusively pictorial: Alfred Easton Poor, *Colonial Architecture of Cape Cod, Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard* (New York: William Helburn Co., 1932) is comprehensive, containing some measured drawings; Samuel Chamberlain, *Cape Cod in the Sun* (New York: Hastings House, 1937) does not identify the buildings.

2. A preliminary survey was made in July–August 1959 for HABS under the auspices of the National Park Service's 'Mission 66' program and in connection with the proposal for a national park on Cape Cod. In making the study, I am indebted to Abbott Lowell Cummings, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, for valuable suggestions and information. Hon. Silas S. Clark of Wellfleet assisted me many times in locating buildings and identifying sites. He generously allowed the use of certified copies of public records cited below. Miss Elizabeth Freeman of Wellfleet showed me the way to remote houses and helped identify others. Mrs. Ruth Dyer of Truro shared her abundant knowledge of local history and genealogy. Miss Dorothea Setzer of Dennis kindly lent me some material. To them, and to the others who permitted me to come into their houses, I here express my gratitude.

3. Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, 4 vols. (New Haven, 1821), III, 97. No earlier use of the term is known. In

eighteenth century the Cape Cod house was a type, fully mature and identifiable. It is numerous today in southern Massachusetts from Plymouth all the way around to the tip of Cape Cod (fig. 2); and the basic eighteenth-century form, in its minor variations, can be seen persisting through the first half of the nineteenth century, still recognizable in the formal garb of Greek Revival. It is the only kind of old dwelling on the Lower Cape—that thin forearm from the elbow out, where old ways lasted late and pure—and in 1800 Dwight observed that its characteristics were particular to 'the great body of houses from Yarmouth to Race Point.'<sup>4</sup> Here then let us concentrate: the Lower Cape, in its century of traditional building dating approximately 1750–1850.

1797 Dwight began a systematic series of travels during his annual summer vacations, recording his observations as letters to an imaginary English gentleman. His complete descriptions provide a wealth of architectural and topographical information.





Fig. 2. Sketch map of Cape Cod, Massachusetts (author).

'The Cape begins at the canal', you will be told today. But this is a modern definition, for the canal, although proposed before the Revolution, was not constructed until shortly before the first World War. The name of Cape Cod, however, has been in use since its discovery in 1602. Originally applied in a strict geographic sense only to the head of land (between Provincetown and Race Point), the name was gradually expanded to include all the peninsula up to the bend, finally all up to the isthmus—the Cape as we know it today. This development no doubt partially accounts for the sense of separateness still obtaining on the Lower Cape, which is strictly considered to begin below Brewster, hence comprising Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro, and Provincetown. All of the Cape was originally a part of the Plymouth colony, now all in Barnstable County. Permanent settlement began at Sandwich (ca. 1637) and was early confined chiefly to the bay side, where are the architecturally rich towns of Sandwich, Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis, and Brewster. The Lower Cape settlements generally date later, growing out of Eastham (incorporated in 1651, although no seventeenth-century buildings survive). Orleans was set off as a parish in 1718, but not incorporated until 1797. A north precinct called Billingsgate, on the bay side, was created in 1723 and organized as Wellfleet in 1763. Meanwhile the scattered settlement of Truro had been incorporated in 1709, and 'The Province Town' was made a precinct of

Truro in 1714 and incorporated in 1727.<sup>5</sup> The old-timers were almost pure English stock, Congregationalist or Methodist. Some Portuguese came early in the nineteenth century. The Cape-Codder was a fisherman or farmer—mariner or yeoman, as the deeds say—who dwelt in 'thrifty though comfortable circumstances,' according to Dwight.

The Lower Cape towns, growing up slowly in the late eighteenth century, flourished in the first half of the nineteenth.<sup>6</sup> The fisheries and salt-works were most numerous in 1837 and high populations of about 2500 were achieved in 1850. Afterwards declining rapidly, the towns had sunk to half or less by 1880, excepting Provincetown, which was then beginning to draw some summer visitors. During this flourishing period the Lower Cape was relatively isolated, the principal outside communication being by sea, although service was irregular and infrequent. Internal communication was primitive. Although the King's Highway had got as far out as Wellfleet by the early date 1717, it was described in 1800 as 'a mere bed of deep sand',<sup>7</sup> and travelers confirm that character until the first World War, when some paving was introduced. And so we read that in 1829 there was only one horse in Provincetown, and until 1846 daily stages went out only as far as Orleans, whence a wide-tired wagon proceeded periodically to Provincetown. The Lower Cape was opened up only by the railroad. The Old Colony line, reaching Sandwich in 1848, did not attain Orleans until 1865, nor Provincetown until 1873. These late dates coincide with the decline of the towns and the first signs of summer tourism,<sup>8</sup> marking the transition to the modern epoch. The towns flourish once again, but now primarily to serve the 'summer people', who occupy most of the old houses, some of which are maintained merely for rental. It is rare now to find an authentic Cape-Codder dwelling under an ancestral roof.

In the peak year 1850 we can estimate there were almost 2000 dwellings on the Lower Cape. Near half of them

4. Dwight, *Travels*, III, 97.

5. Franklin W. Cook, *Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities and Towns in Massachusetts* (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1948), *passim*. See also *Eastham, Massachusetts, 1651-1951* (Eastham Tercentenary Committee, 1951), pp. 18-19. Popular, though factual, town histories are given by Scott Corbett, *Cape Cod's Way* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1955).

6. Brief descriptions of the towns in 1762 are recorded by another Yale president, Ezra Stiles, *Extracts from the Itineraries and other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles . . .*, Franklin Bowditch Dexter (ed.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), pp. 162-168. In 1762 Provincetown had 40 English families, Truro 180. In the 1790 census Provincetown had a population of 434, Truro 1192, Wellfleet 1113. By 1810 Provincetown had reached 936. The flourish and decline are detailed by Shebnah Rich, *Truro—Cape Cod, or Land Marks and Sea Marks* (Boston, 1883), pp. 449-462.

7. Dwight, *Travels*, III, 88.

8. *Atlantic Coast Guide, a Companion for the Tourist* (Boston and New York, 1873), pp. 95-108, on Cape Cod.



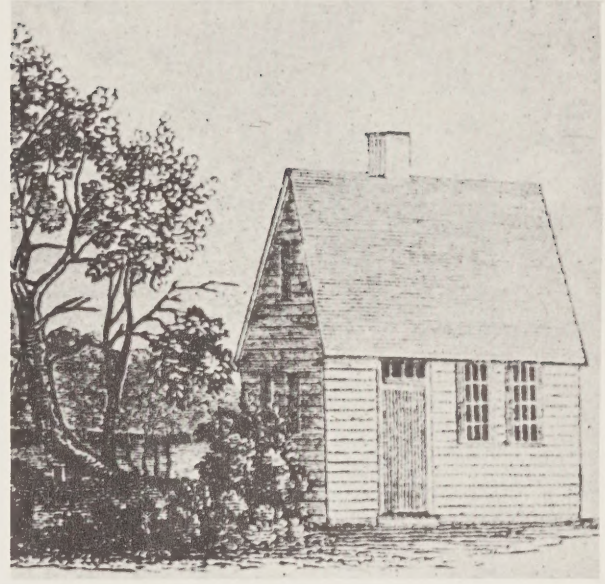
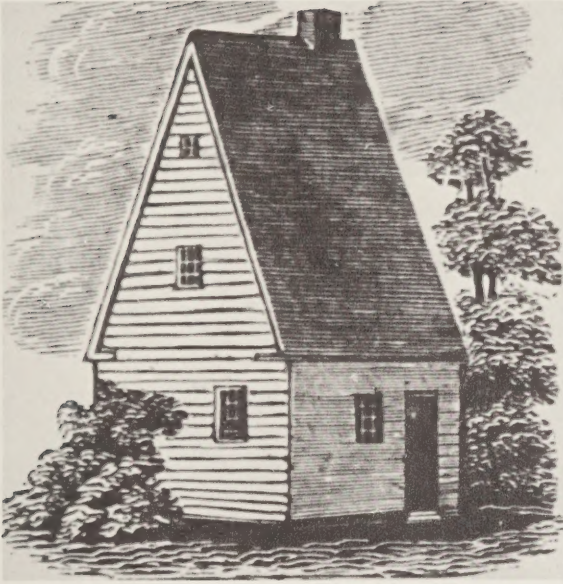


Fig. 3. (left) Peek House, Medfield, late seventeenth century (from Barber, *History and Antiquities of New England . . .*). (right) House which formerly stood on the farm of Governor Thomas Prence in Eastham (from Barber, *History and Antiquities of New England . . .*). This woodcut, before 1839, is one of the earliest graphic representations of a traditional house on the Lower Cape.

must still be there. They can be found scattered along the loose network of roads forming the town centers, dotted on the barren heaths overlooking the bay, and, with more difficulty, out in the sand, obscured by stunted forests of pine and oak, or buried in the deep hollows running at right angles to the coast. In its characteristic setting (fig. 4), the house is nestled under the lee of a hill covered by shrubby trees. Now as then, it faces south, as all the early historians agree, 'without regard to the street or road.'<sup>9</sup> In the early nineteenth century a typical establishment consisted of the house, a small but neat barn nearby, with an orchard of apples or pears and a small garden, all enclosed by a post-and-rail fence. The orchard and house were commonly defended from the sea winds by a barrier of cherry trees or locusts.<sup>10</sup> The complete character of a prosperous farm of the late eighteenth century is indicated by the inventory (1779) of the estate of John Rich,<sup>11</sup>

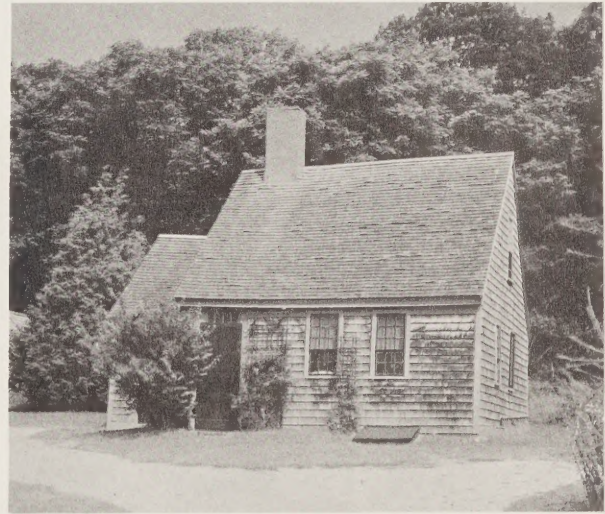


Fig. 4. Rowell House, Gull Pond Road, Wellfleet, mid?-eighteenth century (photo: Cervin Robinson for HABS). An archaic survival in typical traditional setting. Original owner unknown; now owned by Miss Clara Rowell.

9. Frederick Freeman, *The History of Cape Cod. Annals of the Thirteen Towns of Barnstable County*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1869), I, 187. *The History* (first pub. 1858) and the *Annals* (first pub. 1862) constitute a basic work, a source for most of the later historians.

10. Dwight, *Travels*, III, 79, 89, and Rich, *Truro*, pp. 347-349. Also Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, 2 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1896), II, 2, 7. Thoreau made short tours of the Cape in 1849, 1850, 1855. His essays, originally published in *Putnam's Magazine* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, first appeared as a book in 1864. His descriptions make a comparison with the earlier ones of Dwight, and the two together form our most instructive travel accounts. The Cape Cod fence is discussed in *Old-Time New England*, XIV, 21 ff.

11. Barnstable County Probate Records, II, 138-141. The probate records largely survived the courthouse fire of 1827 and are doubtless a rich source for further study (Barnstable is the county seat). The Rich House is now owned by Miss Grace Deschamps.

whose house still stands on Fisher Road, Truro. His farm property included one dwelling house, one barn, half a salt-pit, an old shop, an old corn house, an orchard with a garden therein containing about one acre, a field taking in a small island (twenty acres in the whole), a neck of land north and west of the house including a cove of meadow from the salt-pit to the beach (nine acres), a field south of the barn (five and a half acres), and other small parcels of land, mostly meadow or woods, not all of it contiguous, ranging in size from three-quarters of an acre to twelve acres. The town centers consisted of more compact rural settings, each being an independent unit enclosed by a



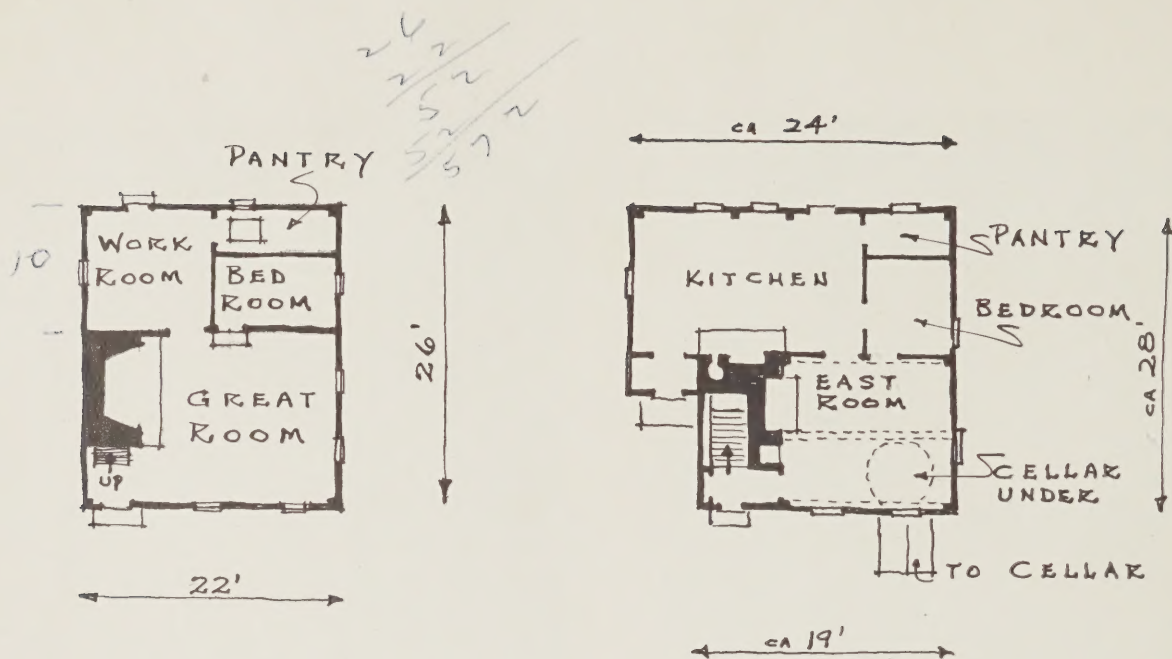


Fig. 5. (left) Sketch plan, Hallett House, Yarmouth, seventeenth century, reconstructed from Otis, *Genealogical Notes* (author). (right) Sketch plan, Rowell House, Gull Pond Road, Wellfleet (author). The basic 'house', which could be 'doubled'.

fence and containing the house, a small garden patch, orchard, and a bit of greensward, with a plank walk leading from the sandy road to the front door.<sup>12</sup> The exception was Provincetown, where the front yards were merely 'portions of the beach fenced in', and the fences were tight board walls, often set as close as a foot to the houses, to keep off the drifting sand.<sup>13</sup>

The old houses you will find on the Lower Cape are practically all identifiable as traditional Cape Cod cottages. There is no instance of a saltbox below Brewster; and while there are some Georgian gambrels and Federalist hipped-roofs on the upper Cape, where by the time of the Revolution Squire Edmund Bacon could boast a mansion of twenty rooms in Barnstable,<sup>14</sup> nothing of the sort was possible on the Lower Cape. Here the inhabitants restricted themselves to a single type, modifying it and enlarging it as their needs required and circumstances permitted. There are several standard variations of the type, depending on size as readily expressed in the south elevation (fig. 8), ranging from a house one room wide to a house two rooms wide. The latter (figs. 7, 13) is the largest kind, the fully mature type. Numerous today, such houses were described by Dwight in 1800:

These have one story, and four rooms on the lower floor; and are covered on the sides, as well as the roofs, with pine shingles, eighteen inches in length. The chimney is in the middle, immediately

behind the front door; and on each side of the door are two windows. The roof is straight. Under it are two chambers; and there are two larger, and two smaller, windows in the gable end.<sup>15</sup>

Dwight describes what Truro's historian Shebnah Rich (1824-1907) defines as the 'old-fashioned double-house', explaining: '... the rule was one low story ... with two liberal-sized front rooms, an immense kitchen, with two bedrooms and a buttery, or pantry, on the lower floor, and a "square-chamber" upstairs.' And since the houses all faced south, 'The two front rooms were known as the "east room," where the family lived with the sunshine ... and the west room, known as the "great room," which was for guests and special occasions. The spacious kitchens ... were open to all work in summer, and used for storage and common work in winter.'<sup>16</sup> Accordingly then a 'double-house' (fig. 7) is a symmetrical block with a central doorway flanked by paired windows. The entry is shallow, with steep stairs (only four or five feet in the run) ascending between fireplaces in the east room and west room. The front chimneys join the great central stack of the kitchen fireplace under the level of the garret floor (ceilings are commonly about seven feet high), and the kitchen and its fireplace are centered in the rear portion of the house. The kitchen is flanked by two small bedrooms, one of which is usually reduced to allow a pantry. The small bedroom on the right is traditionally called the 'borning room', because of its constant use for childbirth and nursing, being near the conveniences of the hearth in kitchen or east room. Now if this fully mature plan constitutes a 'double-house', then a plan only one room wide (fig. 5), with the

12. J. Milton Mackie, *From Cape Cod to Dixie* (1864), extract in Edith Shay and Frank Shay, *Sand in their Shoes: a Cape Cod Reader* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 152. Mackie was on the Cape before the Civil War.

13. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, II, 31-33, 97, 130.

14. Henry C. Kittredge, *Cape Cod; its People and their History* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), p. 79.

15. Dwight, *Travels*, III, 79.

16. Rich, *Truro*, pp. 340-341.



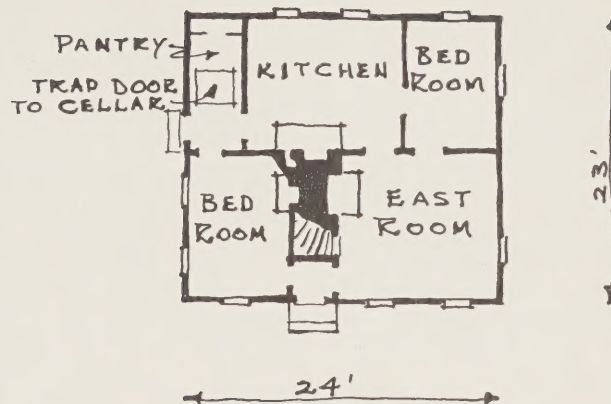
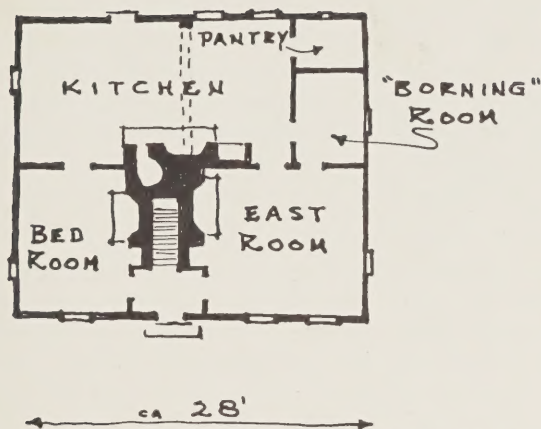


Fig. 6. (left) Sketch plan, partly reconstructed, Baker-Biddle House, Bound Brook Island, Wellfleet, early nineteenth century (author). A characteristic house-and-a-half, with one large room to the right of the entrance and a smaller room to the left, now enlarged. Probably built by David Baker, father of Lorenzo Dow Baker (1840-1908); now the summer residence of the Hon. Francis Biddle. (right) Sketch plan, partly reconstructed, Cole-Wheeler House, Prince Valley Road, South Truro, before 1850 (author). The smallest observed example of a house-and-a-half, now enlarged.

doorway to one side (usually the west) and paired windows on its right, is by inference only a 'house'. Logically then a plan of intermediate magnitude makes a 'house-and-a-half' (fig. 6), which characteristically has on the left a smaller room, with only one front window, and only one bedroom flanking the kitchen. Today these variations are often, and confusingly, referred to as half-house, three-quarter-house, and house. However, since there is no historical foundation for the modern descriptive terms, we must, I think, accept the nomenclature stated and implied by Rich. Thus we have the standard variations of the type, as well as an evolutionary sequence: house, house-and-a-half, double-house. A house will measure about twenty feet across the front, a house-and-a-half about twenty-eight feet, and a double-house about thirty-four, or a maximum of about forty feet in the largest examples.

Other variations concern details. Dwight found them too slight to mention, and you will still hear, 'the houses are all alike.' The common characteristics are, of course, abundant and details vary only in minor degree. Interior details consist of chair-rails and a few mouldings; fire-place walls are paneled in simplified forms suggesting a distant kinship to metropolitan styles. Each fireplace is characteristically adjoined by a shallow cupboard with a sash door. Today the interiors are painted, in unverifiable colors, although the Cape historians tell us that white-wash was standard in the eighteenth century and that the floors were never painted, rather scrubbed with white sand, which in well-disciplined families was kept in neat puddles from one week to the next.<sup>17</sup> The exteriors uniformly exhibit simple box cornices, 9/6 light sashes, and

transoms. The most conspicuous variation is in the arrangement of gable windows (fig. 9), appearing to Thoreau as if each occupant 'had punched a hole where his necessities required it, and according to his size and stature, without regard to outside effect.'<sup>18</sup> He noticed some triangular windows low under the eaves, and a few still exist. Exterior walls are most frequently shingled, as Dwight observed in 1800, although often you will see the south front, and sometimes the north, finished with clapboards (apparently original). Today clapboards and trim are usually painted, while the shingles are not. As to earlier appearances, the travel accounts are mildly helpful.<sup>19</sup> For example, Dwight (in 1800) observes that the houses of Truro 'are painted in fewer instances than in Yarmouth and some other places', while those of Wellfleet exhibit 'more appearances of attention and taste.' In the mid-nineteenth century Thoreau refers to 'the old-fashioned and unpainted houses on the Cape', although in Dennis he noted that the roofs were often painted red, while the rest was unpainted. As to other variations, the exceptional situation of Provincetown must be noted. In 1800 the houses were built on piles, to prevent the driving sand from piling against the walls. Fifty years later Thoreau found only a few remaining, and they were mostly boarded up, while the newer houses were much like those elsewhere.

The plan of the Cape Cod house descends almost pure from the seventeenth century, doubtless originating in the primitive one-room-and-loft cottages of Plymouth.<sup>20</sup> A

18. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, I, 105.

19. Dwight, *Travels*, III, 90, 95, 100. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, I, 32; II, 130.

20. See Charles R. Strickland, 'The First Permanent Dwellings at Plimoth Plantation', *Old-Time New England*, XL, 3 (Jan. 1950), 163-169.

17. Freeman, *The History*, I, 186-187. Rich, *Truro*, p. 343. Kitredge, *Cape Cod*, p. 77.



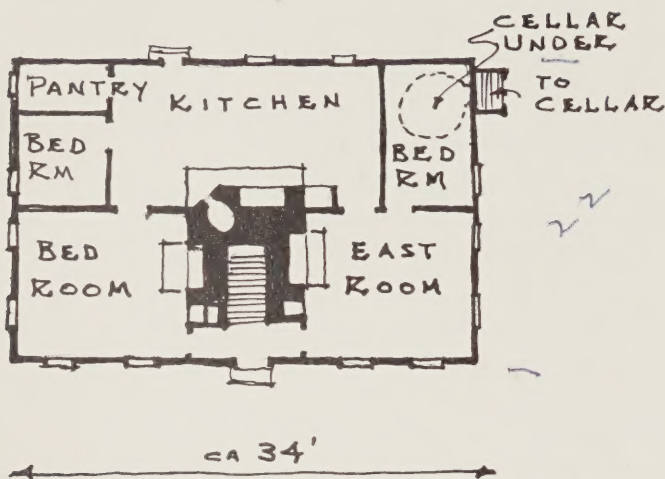


Fig. 7. Sketch plan, Higgins-Avery House, between Gull Pond and Higgins Pond, Wellfleet, ca. 1830 (author). A characteristic double-house, now slightly modified. Probably built by Josiah Higgins; now owned by Mrs. William H. Avery.

late seventeenth-century specimen of this plan-type is the Waite-Potter House at South Westport, Massachusetts, measuring sixteen by twenty-four feet on the ground and consisting of one large room—the ‘hall’ or ‘fire-room’—with a large fireplace taking up most of the west wall, leaving space for a small entry with a ladder giving to the loft.<sup>21</sup> As we know, this kind of plan was often expanded by the addition of rear rooms under a lean-to, and we can reconstruct the plan of such a house on Cape Cod (fig. 5) from the analysis of Amos Otis (1801–1875), discerning historian of Barnstable.<sup>22</sup> One Andrew Hallett, Jr., moved in 1642 from Sandwich to Yarmouth, where he built a house before his death in 1684. The house appears to have been a story and a half with lean-to, all together about twenty-two by twenty-six feet in plan; with a ‘great room’ about seventeen feet square in the southeast, a fireplace eight feet wide on the west wall (since Otis tells us that the houses always faced south), a kitchen or workroom in the northwest, and in the northeast a small pantry with trap door to the cellar. Crowded between pantry and great room was a bedroom, just large enough for a bed, with the floor raised about two feet to give more headroom in the cellar. This is essentially the same plan we find a hundred years later in the Rowell House, Wellfleet (fig. 5), one of the most archaic examples on the Lower Cape. In basic form the houses would differ in the matter of the lean-to; however, we know that in the seventeenth century

similar plans were embodied under straight gable roofs. A surviving relative of other seventeenth-century ancestors, then, is the Peek House at Medfield, Massachusetts (fig. 3), which is reputed to have been standing at the time of King Philip’s War (1676) and was already in the early nineteenth century regarded as a curious relic by the historian John Warner Barber (1798–1885),<sup>23</sup> according to whom it is fourteen and a half by twenty-four feet in plan, containing an entry, one large room, and a pantry, and in the attic story, two chambers, and above them a narrow garret. Barber measured it ten feet from ground to eaves and twelve feet from eaves to ridge. This form can be seen carrying over into the early eighteenth century in a small house which formerly stood on the farm of Governor Thomas Prentice in Eastham, and later in the Rowell House, Wellfleet (figs. 3, 4).

The sequence of house, house-and-a-half, double-house must be thought of as a general pattern of evolution rather than a chronological guide, for all varieties were built simultaneously. Indeed, the plan of the double-house had already been realized in Massachusetts by the dawn of the eighteenth century,<sup>24</sup> and in the isolation of the Lower Cape a ‘house’ of the most modest seventeenth-century dimensions was built as late as 1838, when one William Stevens, mariner, of Truro, engaged Benjamin Hinckley, carpenter, to build a house seventeen feet wide and twenty-two feet long, containing ‘one square room’, a buttery, a small kitchen or washroom, and two bedrooms (presumably one of them in the garret).<sup>25</sup> While the great majority of houses were built in characteristic form all at once, the house-and-a-half (fig. 1) being the most numerous, there are instances of enlargement. The plan of the Rowell House (fig. 5) shows with what ease it could be ‘doubled’, the position of chimney and stairs suggesting that it was built with that possibility in mind. We know that the Higgins House, Wellfleet, was doubled, probably before 1805; apparently also the Harding-Lloyd House, Truro, at an equally early date. Enlargements to double-houses usually took the form of ells (fig. 10). Additions of one kind or another were probably not uncommon in the early nineteenth century; for example, an English visitor in 1808 was put up for the night in Truro by Captain Obadiah Rich, whom he found with a young family and ‘a house, of which the dimensions were increasing.’<sup>26</sup> But if a dwelling could be doubled it could also be divided, legally and physically. There are instances of property lines

21. Thomas T. Waterman, *The Dwellings of Colonial America* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1950), p. 245. Also in HABS.

22. Amos Otis, *Genealogical Notes of Barnstable Families* (Barnstable, 1888), extract in Shay, *Sand*, pp. 44–56 (first pub. in *Barnstable Patriot*, 1861). Otis shows a good understanding of seventeenth-century construction, and does not subscribe to the log-cabin myth.

23. John Warner Barber, *The History and Antiquities of New England, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania* (Hartford, 1842), p. 528. A photograph of the house is in Waterman, *Dwellings*, p. 244, from HABS.

24. See Morrison, *Early American*, pp. 20–22.

25. Deed Book 21, 158.

26. Edward Augustus Kendall, *Travels through the Northern Parts of the United States in the Years 1807 and 1808* (New York, 1809), p. 147.





Fig. 8. Standard variations of the Cape Cod house as revealed in the south elevation: (l. to r.) house, house-and-a-half, double-house (author).



Fig. 9. Standard variations of the gable observed on the Lower Cape (author). The two at the left are characteristic of the house and house-and-a-half; the two at the right of the double-house.

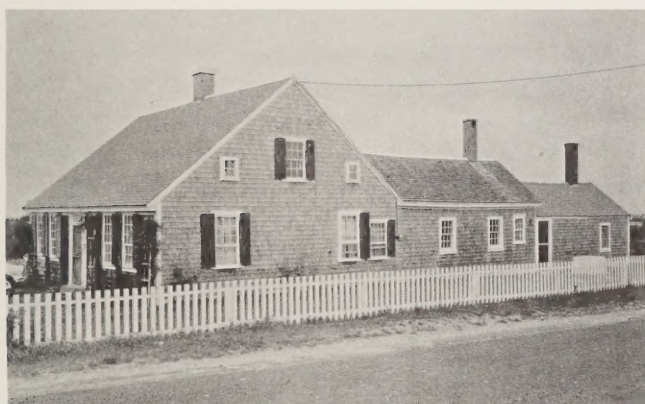


Fig. 10. Cook House, King's Highway, North Truro, late eighteenth century (photo: Cervin Robinson for HABS). Reputedly occupied by workmen during construction of the Cape Cod lighthouse (Highland Light) in 1797. A double-house successively enlarged with ells; now owned by Professor Roy J. Cook.



Fig. 11. Hoxie House, Sandwich, mid-seventeenth century, under restoration in 1959, revealing plank construction (photo: Cervin Robinson for HABS).

drawn right through the middle. In 1805 Thomas Holbrook and Solomon Higgins, both yeomen, conveyed to Thomas Atwood, mariner, 'All the Land that we now own in . . . Wellfleet on Bound Brook Island with all the wood on said land, and half the Dwellinghouse now standing on said Island where said Higgins now lives and dwells, . . .'<sup>27</sup> There are also verbal accounts of houses being 'flaked down', namely, sawn apart and moved, from one place to another; and Rich mentions the frequent 'removal' of houses in the 1870s.

Structurally, the Cape Cod house is characterized by 'plank construction',<sup>28</sup> a seventeenth-century practice probably introduced on the Cape by early settlers from Essex County, particularly from the vicinity of Lynn. It can be seen in the Cape's oldest building, the Hoxie House at Sandwich (fig. 11), and it persisted beyond the middle of the nineteenth century. Typically, the Cape Cod house has a box-like frame (fig. 12) consisting of

28. More research is needed on this subject. A similar kind known as 'box construction' has persisted in the South, for the cheapest buildings, well into the twentieth century. Doubtless a common origin could be found in late Tudor building practice.

27. Re-recorded in Deed Book 2, 289 et seq. Courtesy of Mr. George K. Higgins.



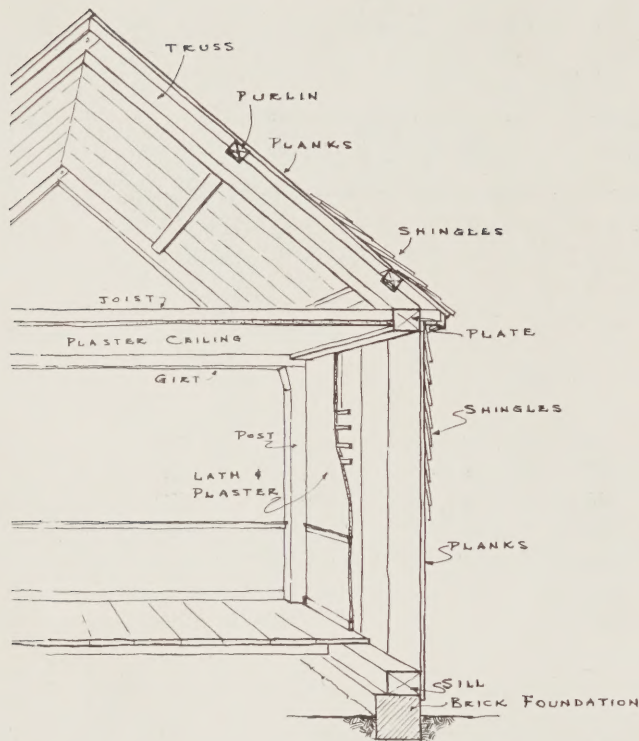


Fig. 12. Sketch of typical plank construction observed in the traditional houses of Lower Cape Cod (author).

hewn sills, corner posts, plates, and girts (no studs). Sawn planks twelve to eighteen inches wide are nailed vertically to the outside face of sill and plate, and shingles, or sometimes clapboards, are nailed directly to the planks; inside, riven lath and plaster are applied directly to the planks, making a wall about three inches thick. Window frames thus protrude on the exterior, visually announcing the character of wall construction. Posts, plates, and girts are exposed on the interior, also usually a 'summer' for intermediate support of the garret floor. The roof consists of a series of simple hewn trusses with purlins (no rafters or ridgepole). Solid planking is nailed at right angles to purlins and plate, and to this sheathing the shingles are nailed. This system was gradually replaced by conventional frame construction. About 1850 Thoreau notes, 'The modern houses are built of what is called "dimension timber", imported from Maine, all ready to be set up, so that commonly they do not touch it again with an axe.'<sup>29</sup> Timber for the older houses was also probably imported, the Lower Cape having been stripped of any tall forests before the end of the eighteenth century. Thoreau reports the same: '... they will tell you that large schooners were once built of timber which grew in Wellfleet. The old houses, also, are built of the timber of the Cape; but instead of the forests in the midst of which they originally stood, barren heaths ... now stretch away on every side.'

29. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, II, 4, this and the following.

Masonry construction on the Lower Cape is restricted to chimneys, cellars, and foundations:<sup>30</sup> all of brick (imported). Stones, brought in as ballast, may have been used in the earliest buildings; but as Thoreau reminds us, 'Stones are very rare on Cape Cod', and in his time 'vessels had been forbidden to take them from the beach for ballast.' He saw one instance of a house being underpinned with 'rocks', which had been collected with great pains over many years. Bricks, on the other hand, were in standard use by 1800 according to Dwight, who describes cellars exactly as you will find them today: small and circular, to prevent the sand from caving in the walls. Thoreau accurately adds that they 'are only from nine to twelve feet in diameter, and are said to be very cheap, since a tier of brick will suffice for a cellar of even larger dimensions. Of course, if you live in the sand, you will not require a large cellar to hold your roots.'

A few building contracts survive from the flourishing decades. The following may be regarded as fairly typical. It is an agreement between Andrew Cobb, mariner, and Thomas Paine II, housewright of Truro, in 1843, for the construction of a house-and-a-half (now disappeared) off Old County Road in South Truro.<sup>31</sup> The closest surviving approximation is the Cole-Wheeler House (fig. 6), which was built about the same time nearby on Prince Valley Road.<sup>32</sup> For \$450.00 Paine bound himself, 'in good and workmanlike manner and according to the best of his art and skill', to:

... build and set up and finish all below the chamber floor, one house or messuage of the dimensions and particular description following. Viz: Twenty-three feet square on the ground floor, ten feet posts, hemlock timber and boarding boards, the roof and front side to be shingled with pine shingles, the two ends and back side with cedar shingles, finish the lower part of the house into one front room, one kitchen, two bedrooms, one butry, front and end entry, two flights of stairs if needed and plain [sic] the boards for a chamber floor, the front room and kitchen to be ceiled up to the windows, glass closet door in the front room, iron latches for all the doors, seven by nine glass for all the windows, a common cellar under the house with a cellar house outside.

There is a stylistic development evident in the houses of the Lower Cape, although progressive differences are slight. The best indicator is the placement of windows in the south wall. In the oldest examples (fig. 4) the window frames come directly under the box cornice; the wall height is gradually raised, with the windows relatively lower; by the 1830s the wall is normally about ten feet

30. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, II, 134-135. Dwight, *Travels*, III, 95.

31. Deed Book 33, 261. The carpenter may have been the Thomas Paine (1779-1860) who is buried, beside his wife Priscilla, in the Methodist Cemetery, Truro. No likelier candidate was available in the other cemeteries or in the *Vital Records of the Town of Truro, Massachusetts to the End of the Year 1849* (Boston, 1933).

32. This house was standing in 1850 when it was owned by Joseph Cole, who bought more property 'upland under and around where his dwelling house now stands'. Deed Book 48, 52.





Fig. 13. Harding-Lloyd House, North Pamet Road, Truro, ca. 1760 (photo: Cervin Robinson for HABS). An early specimen of the double-house, believed to be the oldest dwelling in Truro.



Fig. 14. Howes-Jorgenson House, Dennis, ca. 1767 (photo: Cervin Robinson for HABS). One of the largest and finest examples of the double-house, measuring forty feet across the front and faced with clapboards. An early addition at the rear, restoration and further enlargement (not shown) in 1936.

high, as in the Cobb-Paine contract and the Gormley House (fig. 1). This latter arrangement did not materially raise the ceiling height of the first story, rather it allowed more headroom upstairs. Fixing the stylistic development to a chronology is difficult, since the Barnstable County deed records were destroyed by fire in 1827 and private building records are scarce. Therefore, to date eighteenth-century examples we must rely on credible local antiquarians and genealogical records, and on making visual comparisons. Here are several cases, all double-houses. The Harding-Lloyd House (fig. 13) is believed to be the oldest house in Truro. According to an account in Rich it can be established that the house was standing in 1775, when it was occupied by Lot Harding II (1721–1802), who apparently built it and certainly reared his large family in it.<sup>33</sup> Harding married (Tamesin Cobb) in 1746, thus fixing construction between 1746 and 1775, say  $1760 \pm 15$ . The Harding-Lloyd House is quite similar to the Doane-Chase House on Nauset Road, Eastham, where a tablet in the yard announces that it was built by Sylvanus Doane and was the birthplace (in 1767) of Captain Obadiah Doane. The Rich-Musgrave House in Longnook Hollow, Truro, is our best dated example. Shebnah Rich, writing in 1878–1880, says that ‘it was built a hundred years ago’ by his grandfather Joshua Rich,<sup>34</sup> and the date 1778 was formerly painted under the west gable. More advanced than the preceding examples, it is stylistically related to the Howes-Jorgenson House in Dennis (fig. 14). The paneling and bolection mouldings on the fireplace walls of the west



Fig. 15. Freeman-Puffer House, Bound Brook Island Road at route 6, Wellfleet, ca. 1840 (photo: Cervin Robinson for HABS). A traditional double-house revealing the influence of the Federal Style.

rooms are virtually identical. The house in Dennis was built by a prosperous farmer, Daniel Howes (1738–1781), who in 1766 married Sarah Collins. According to credible tradition, their son Daniel Howes, Jr., was born there in 1767, which is probably the year of completion.<sup>35</sup>

The eighteenth-century form, with a slight modification in proportion, carries on through the flourishing decades 1830–1850. Also in these years more significant and more visible stylistic changes appear, and we find houses in the Federal Style and in the Greek Revival—doubtless ‘the

33. Rich, *Truro*, pp. 287–288. The Hardings are buried in Old North Cemetery, Truro. After the occupancy of Lot Harding III (1771–1840) the house passed through several hands and about 1920 to Mrs. Herbert Lloyd (d. 1959). It is now owned by her daughter, Mrs. Margaret Lloyd Aiken of New York.

34. Rich, *Truro*, p. 340. The house was moved by Irving Hale Rich (1853–1927) to a site farther west on Longnook Road and attached to an existing house-and-a-half; now the summer residence of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Musgrave.

35. Joshua Crowell Howes, *Genealogy of the Howes Family in America, 1637–1892* (Yarmouth Port, Massachusetts, 1892), pp. 26, 42. Daniel Howes, Jr. (1767–1865) reportedly lived his entire life in this house which was occupied by his descendants (by marriage Jorgenson) until 1932. It is now owned by Miss Dorothea Setzer of New York and Dennis. An early photograph is in Poor, *Colonial Architecture*, pl. 2; interiors, pls. 107, 128.



modern and more pretending ones' mentioned by Thoreau.<sup>36</sup> Houses reflecting Federal influence are fairly numerous; they are uniformly built on one of the traditional plans, the differences residing in woodwork details. The cornice with dentils, for example, can be found on such unlikely specimens as the Gormley House, Wellfleet (fig. 1), and other characteristics can be seen here and there in increasing degree up to the sophisticated Freeman-Puffer House, Wellfleet (fig. 15).<sup>37</sup> Verbally dated about 1840, it is a double-house in plan with a shingled south front graced by dentilled cornice, semi-elliptical fan, and side lights. The emergence of the Greek Revival can be documented with some certainty. Its introduction appears largely due to Pérez Bangs (1763–1834), a Truro 'housewright' of Portuguese origin and Methodist persuasion, whose style of building was carried on by his son Pérez Bangs, Jr. (1793–1877), known as a 'carpenter'. The Greek Revival house which the elder Bangs built for himself still stands, though derelict, off Old County Road (above Fisher Road) in Truro. After the death of his widow, Thankful, the house was sold in 1846, when it was described as the 'Homestead of Pérez Bangs'.<sup>38</sup> This means that it was built before his death (1834) and that the Greek Revival was on the Lower Cape by that date: indeed the majority of houses surviving from the flourishing decades exhibit Greek taste in some degree. A good Greek translation of the Cape vernacular is the Higgins-Clark House, Wellfleet, traditionally dated 1837.<sup>39</sup> A double-house in plan, it is characterized externally by the heightened south front and the monumentalizing effect of pilasters and portal. It was apparently these formal qualities which, compared to the older houses, Thoreau found 'less in harmony with the scenery and less firmly planted.'<sup>40</sup> The Greek Revival houses are generally larger than the older ones, ells often included in the original construction. Plans began to deviate from the old compact arrangement. In late examples such as the Curran House, Wellfleet (fig. 16),<sup>41</sup> an ell-plan dominates and traditional features are evident mainly in the shingled sides and the arrangement of gable windows. Such provincial Greek pediments can be found as far back as the Bangs House, and in the town centers there are occasional two-storied houses,



Fig. 16. Curran House, on route 6 north of Wellfleet center, after 1858 (photo: Cervin Robinson for HABS). Characteristic of the innovations which appear with the Greek Revival.

now and then a rare one with columns. These are called 'captains' houses' and old-timers insist that they too are real 'Cape Cod houses'. Nonetheless, it has to be admitted that the Greek innovations initiate the dissolution of traditional forms.

The tradition disappears in the decades following the Civil War, when there was relatively little building activity on the Cape. The few buildings of this time are usually one- or two-storied mansards found in the town centers. Not only was the Cape subject to current standards of fashion, there was a direct French influence. The French cable landed at Eastham in 1879, bringing new families from France and Belgium. Engineers in the employ of the Compagnie Française du Télégraphe de Paris à New York are credited with the design of many of these late buildings, which apparently date from the eighties and nineties. This architectural development coincides with the passing of one epoch and the beginning of another—with the emigration of old families and the decline of the towns, with the arrival of the railroad and the first 'summer people'. While lamenting the passing of the old ways, the historian Rich notes hopefully, and accurately, '... a glance at the map ... showing the geographical position, configuration and connection by land and water with Boston and New York, is better than any statement or argument, that Cape Cod is by nature wonderfully adapted for, and must become more and more, a summer resort.'<sup>42</sup>

42. Rich, *Truro*, p. 453. Anticipated by Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, II, 203.

36. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, II, 105.

37. Believed to have been built by James Freeman, who married Susannah Wiley. In 1858 it was owned by Mrs. S. Freeman, according to a wall-map of Barnstable County (pub. 1858, based on Geological Survey of 1843–1848 with corrections). Now owned by Mrs. Mary D. Puffer of Washington, D. C.

38. Deed Book 38, 209. The Bangs graves are in Pine Grove Cemetery, South Truro.

39. Higgins on the wall-map of 1858; the earliest deed is dated 1864, when John S. Higgins conveyed. Now owned by Silas S. Clark.

40. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, II, 105.

41. Not indicated on the wall-map of 1858, although very likely built soon afterwards. The *Barnstable County Atlas* of 1880 shows 'Mrs. B. S. Young'. Now owned by Miss Edith Curran.











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